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By- McNeil, John D.

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The University of California, Los Angeles (U.C.L.A.), Coordinators of Supervised Teaching in the elementary schools conducted a study to determine whether assignment to a poverty school (family income less than $4,000 per year) as opposed to assignment in an affluent school (family income in upper 10 percent, high-middle income neighborhoods) would effect differences in terms of teacher stress, attitude, and willingness to accept a permanent teaching position in a poverty school. Attitude was determined by scores earned on the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory, while stress was measured by a 14-item inventory. Ninety-seven candidates for the elementary school credential who met U.C.L.A. student teaching admission requirements were randomly assigned to either a poverty school or an affluent school for student teaching. After the first 10-week assignment (four hours a day, five days a week), student teachers exchanged assignments for a second 10 weeks. It was found that there was no significant difference in mean scores in stress level between those assigned to poverty and affluent schools, assignment in poverty schools depressed attitudes whether the experience was the first or second assignment, and there was little practical difference in numbers of teachers attracted permanently to poverty schools as a result of the kind of school encountered in a first assignment. (SG)

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Initial Teaching in Poverty Versus Affluent Schools: Effect Upon Teacher Stress, Attitudes and Career Choices

John D. McNeil*
University of California, Los Angeles

Introduction

Desire to improve the quality of instruction in schools serving low socio-economic populations draws attention to the question of how to attract good teachers. A simplistic answer says "Select the brightest and highest achieving students from our universities who have indicated intentions to teach and make it mandatory for them to have their first teaching experience working closely with lower class children." Thus, the argument goes, these novice teachers will find intellectual and emotional reward in those schools which would otherwise be unknown to them and therefore they will be predisposed to continue their careers teaching children who need them most.

An underlying assumption in the above argument is that poverty schools can be rewarding to upper class teachers. What are the characteristics of a poverty school that would make such an assumption warranted? Is it likely that a poverty school would have a climate set by an administrator who values inquiry above conformity? An organizational structure that is found with a staff of high morale and effectiveness? The chance to work with teachers who share positive expectations and attitudes toward children?

Perhaps the initial assignment to a poverty school will not increase the number and quality of teachers choosing to work in such schools. It can be reasoned that the beginning teacher is likely to fail in her efforts with children who are more difficult to teach unless the teacher has first

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acquired generalizable teaching competencies in less frustrating situations, i.e. affluent schools where achievement and motivation for school learning are high. Also, it is sometimes said, that without prior classroom exposure to alternative beliefs about learning and children, placement in poverty schools will result in the novice's accepting the negative attitudes presumed to prevail there. Some ground for support of this argument is found in Yee's study of the interpersonal attitudes of teachers in middle and lower class schools.[1] Among other findings, Yee's data show that lower class children are taught by teachers with more negative attitudes towards children.

Problem and Method

The present study may be characterized as an instance of operations research; an attempt to find differences in terms of teacher stress, attitude and willingness to accept a permanent teaching position in a poverty school--differences that might be brought about by the deliberate manipulation of assignments to student teaching. The treatment variables were gross--a ten week initial assignment in a poverty school followed by an assignment of equal length in a school of affluence; versus the reverse.

Poverty schools were those where the majority of the pupils came from homes where the family income was less than $4,000.00 a year. Fifteen elementary schools were selected from among the 91 schools listed on the State poverty list for compensatory education. The median rank-order listing for the schools used was 32, indicating that there were schools serving extremely economically disadvantaged children.

Eight affluent schools were located in West Los Angeles neighborhoods. Five of these schools were serving children who represented families found

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1. Yee, Albert H. "Interpersonal Attitudes of Teachers and Advantaged and Disadvantaged Pupils", Journal of Human Resources, In Press .

in the upper 10 per cent income bracket; three of the schools were in high-middle income neighborhoods. In addition all of the affluent schools had for several years accepted student teachers for training.

Attitude was operationally defined as scores earned on the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory (MTAI). Stress was measured by a 14 item inventory developed by O'Reilly (1968), under the direction of Professor G. Sorenson, U.C.L.A. This inventory elicits responses from teachers regarding (a) physiological changes as an indicator of stress, e.g. "Since I've been student teaching, I have increased some nervous habits such as smoking, nail biting.", and (b) psychological changes in self-doubt in the teacher role, e.g. "I probably should not have selected teaching as a profession."

Subjects and assignments. Ninety-seven candidates for the elementary school credential, all of whom met U.C.L.A. requirements for admission to student teaching, were randomly assigned to one of two schools: poverty or affluence. Each subject spent approximately 4 hours daily, five days per week , for ten weeks in his school where he was responsible, under the direction of a training teacher, for lesson planning, instruction and evaluation of his work. In addition, the subject appeared weekly on campus for group discussion of teaching under the direction of a University coordinator. Attendance at the weekly campus discussions was mixed, with those from poverty and affluent schools attending jointly.

At the end of the first assignment, student teachers were reassigned for a second 10 week period. During the latter assignment those who had been in poverty schools exchanged positions with their peers in the affluent schools.

Measures of stress and attitudes were taken at the beginning and end of the first assignment and at the end of the second assignment. Progressive indicators of career choice were: (a) completion of one or more assignments, (b) acceptance of a full term internship in an inner-city school following first assignment and (c) acceptance of a contract to teach in an inner city school immediately following second assignment.

Results

Table 1 shows the data collected from the stress measure. These data fail to show any significant differences in mean scores in stress level (lower score = higher stress) between those assigned to poverty and affluent schools.

Table 1

Level of Stress after Teaching in Poverty or Affluent School

First Assignment in Affluent School	(N = 34)	M = 46.9	S.D. = 6.2	t = .4 (not sign.)
First Assignment in Poverty School	(N = 34)	M = 46.3	S.D. = 6.2	
Second Assignment in Poverty School	(N = 34)	M = 46.3	S.D. = 9.7	t = .2 (not sign.)
Second Assignment in Affluent School	(N = 34)	M = 45.9	S.D. = 7.3	

Table 2 shows the amount of change in mean score measured on the MTAI after teaching in poverty and affluent schools for those who were present for administration of attitude tests. Prior to teaching, the mean attitude scores for student teachers assigned to the two types of schools were equal.

Both groups had the same score of 49, a relatively high score (more positive attitude) than that held by the students following their experiences as teachers. Examination of Table 2 reveals that assignment in poverty schools depressed attitudes whether the experience occurred as the first or the second assignment. Teaching in affluent schools as a second assignment for those who had been previously in poverty schools was associated with a return to a more positive attitude. The data appearing in Table 2 indicate the amount of change in attitude for students under the two experimental conditions.

Table 2

Teacher Attitudes after Teaching in Poverty and Affluent Schools

First Assignment in Affluent School	(N = 37)	M = 42.4	S.D. = 18.8	t = 3.02 ($p < .01$)
First Assignment in Poverty School	(N = 37)	M = 27.0	S.D. = 24.1	
Second Assignment in Poverty School	(N = 37)	M = 32.1	S.D. = 21.4	
Second Assignment in Affluent School	(N = 37)	M = 33.4	S.D. = 22.6	

A comparison by percentages of student teachers who changed negatively is as follows:

after first assignment in affluent school, 59% became more negative

after first assignment in poverty school, 70% became more negative

after second assignment in affluent school, 40% became more negative

after second assignment in poverty school, 43% became more negative

Pre and post measures of attitude reveal that 65% of those who began in affluent followed by teaching in poverty schools ended their training with more negative attitudes; while 75% of those who began in poverty schools and finished their training in affluent schools became more negative.

As indicted in Table 3, there was little practical difference in numbers of teachers attracted permanently to poverty schools as a result of the kind of school encountered in a first assignment.

Table 3

Indicators of Desire to Teach following Assignment in Affluent and Poverty Schools

	Number completing both assignments	Number who left program	Number accepting Internship in Poverty Area	Number accepting Permanent Position in Poverty Area
First Assignment in Poverty School followed by Second Assignment Affluent School	34	6	9	1
First Assignment in Affluent School followed by Second Assignment in Poverty School	36	4	9	0

Discussion

Placement of student teachers in poverty schools tends to make them view children and instruction differently. Most teachers value teacher control more highly after such an experience than those who complete their first teaching in affluent schools. As a consequence of teaching in inner-city schools, attitudes toward children become more negative; that is, more teachers

change their attitudes in a negative direction and the degree of negativism held becomes greater. It is generally true that most U.C.L.A. student teachers, regardless of social economic neighborhood in which they teach, tend to become more negative toward children while student teaching. Most of this change occurs during the first assignment. One should question what really happens in those particular schools (found in both affluent and poverty neighborhoods) where there is extreme change in the direction of negative attitudes and practices toward children. Is this change due to the instructional views held by the school's principal and training teachers?

The data suggest that change in attitude by which the teacher comes to value controlling functions over children may develop without accompanying higher stress, at least so far as stress was measured in this study. Further, student teachers in affluent and poverty schools do not seem to differ in the degree of stress reported.

With respect to recruitment of teachers for inner-city schools, the data indicate that whether one starts his teaching in a poverty school or not makes little practical difference as to the probability of his retention in teaching and his willingness to accept a contract to teach in poverty schools.